

Winter Weather



When the winter draws in Zurich Municipal customers are faced with a number of risks faced by inclement weather. The impact of cold weather, snow and ice, needs to be managed by organisations to minimise losses and the impact it can have on services.

This short guide aims to highlight a number of actions to be taken to reduce the risk of property damage and from incurring liability from employees and the public for failure to clear snow and ice. It also outlines some basic guidance on driving in snow and ice. In many situations snow and ice can be deemed an obvious hazard and actions are unlikely to be necessary, however in some situations a reasonable approach should be taken.



Winter Precautions to reduce the risk of property damage

Zurich Municipal is recommending that property owners take precautions to minimise the risk of damage occurring to their properties this winter. These involve taking simple and practical steps such as carrying out regular inspections and ensuring heating systems are kept on, to avoid freezing.

While freezing weather is almost certain to be the cause of some major losses this winter, in most cases only minor damage will occur. However, these minor incidents can interrupt the running of organisations, costing the customer valuable time and money.

In many cases these incidents can be avoided by implementing simple risk management measures.

- Heating systems, particularly boilers, should be inspected and maintained under a full maintenance contract.
- Frost thermostats should be fitted to ensure that boilers and heating systems automatically come on in cold periods.
- Heating systems should be left on to ensure the ambient temperature of the building is high enough to prevent the possibility of water pipes freezing.
- Inspections should be made to ensure that pipes and water tanks are adequately lagged. Particular attention should be given to roof spaces and areas where pipework could be exposed to low temperatures.

- Roof spaces should be inspected to ensure insulation materials are in good condition and correctly installed.
- Ensure that automatic sprinkler systems are fully maintained and that alternate systems are switched to air during winter months.
- Ensure that heating is provided in the sprinkler valve room.
- All water pipes, tanks and heating systems in unoccupied buildings should be drained and water supplies disconnected. Regular inspections should also be made to ensure the buildings are in good order.
- Any external water taps should be protected with insulation to protect them from frost.
- Plans of the building which highlight the location of stopcocks should be available, so water can be quickly turned off in an emergency.
- Implement maintenance contracts to ensure that gutters are cleared of fallen leaves and debris. This will reduce the risk of blockages and subsequent overflowing of water into a building.
- Roofs, ridge tiles and chimneys should be inspected to ensure they are in a good state of repair to withstand the rain, snow and high winds of winter.

Winter Precautions – Gritting – Non Highways

Zurich Municipal regularly receives enquires into whether there is a legal requirement to grit car parks, paths, communal areas and such like by our customers. By clearing snow and ice from paths and communal areas the risk of slipping and tripping to visitors is minimised. However, on most occasions, it is unlikely that an organisation will have the necessary resources to do so. The approach that is required is one of reasonability.

For visitors to your premises, not employees, an occupier must exercise the “common duty of care to all his visitors”: Occupiers Liability Act 1957. This is a duty to take such care as in all the circumstances is reasonable to see that the visitor will be reasonably safe in using the premises for the purposes for which he is invited or permitted by the occupier to be there. The duty in Scotland under the Occupiers Liability (Scotland) Act 1960 is to exercise “...such care as in all the circumstances of the case is reasonable to see that a person will not suffer injury or damage by reason of any such danger”.

The approved code of practice for the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 suggests that organisations should make arrangements to minimise risks from snow and ice and this may involve gritting, snow clearing and closure of some routes, particularly outside stairs, ladders and walkways on roofs.

When considering whether to grit and clear snow and ice, it is necessary to consider on a risk assessment basis whether it would be reasonable to do so and if so to what extent. The risk assessment should take into account those who could be affected and the resources available. A risk-based plan prioritising the organisation’s approach to snow and ice should be developed and records kept of any actions that have been taken. It should not be forgotten that it is often worse to state that you will clear snow and ice and then find that you don’t have the resources to do so.

Factors to consider within a plan/assessment include:

Areas to clear/grit – identify any key areas based on

- Key access routes
- The extent of foot flow (rural vs. urban, main access route to premises vs. rarely used path, etc.)
- Vulnerable persons (for example residents in sheltered housing schemes)

Weather

- How much snow etc. is forecasted?
- How long is snow/ice likely to be around?
- When is the right time to grit based on weather forecasts

Resources

- Availability of staff to grit/clear snow and ice
- Cost and materials to grit/clear snow and ice
- How often and for how long would you be able to do this?



Winter Precautions – Gritting – Highways

The legal requirements to clear snow and ice differ between public highways, that is those maintained at public expense, and those that are associated with private land such as car parks and access roads on private land. For the latter, the risk-based approach discussed in the previous section for non highways should be taken.

For highways that are the responsibility of highways authority there is a legal duty under section 41(1A) of the Highways Act 1980 to ensure that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice. It is not an absolute duty, it is one of reasonably practicable. In Scotland, the statutory duty is governed by section 34 of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 which says:- “a roads authority shall take such steps as they consider reasonable to prevent snow and ice endangering the safe passage of pedestrians and vehicles over public road. It should be noted that the duty rests upon the Highway Authority (in Scotland the roads authority) only.

The duty to grit the highway is not absolute, but there will be a strong presumption that a Highway Authority will exercise sufficient management skill over resource and budget allocation, to ensure that sufficient supplies are available. A successful defence will rely upon what was reasonably practicable in terms of the scale of the issue and the explanation for the lack of grit, e.g. how the Authority sought to replace depleted stocks, the availability of replacement stocks and how it stores the grit.

To help demonstrate that reasonable precautions have been taken there is a need to have a winter service plan. The plan should:

- Be reasonable and prioritise the schedule of gritting based on the characteristics of the Highway following a hierarchical structure as advocated in the "Code of Good Practice for Highway Maintenance" and "Well Maintained Highways" published by the Stationery Office
- Identify the use of accurate weather prediction and information systems to inform the decision making process
- Outline the decision making process of what measures are to be taken, when and who by
- Highlight the availability of grit
- Detail the preventative measures to be taken i.e. precautionary salting / gritting including the system, timing and frequency of gritting
- Consider ongoing management measures such as salting / gritting following the formation of ice / snow and the clearance of ice / snow
- Outline the training provided to staff involved in the process
- Detail how the actions taken are recorded, including when and why
- Detail the complaints handling process and identifying and dealing with specific dangerous areas
- Outline how the plan will be monitored and reviewed.

Winter Precautions – Working Outdoors

An area that must also be considered is the health and safety of staff that may be exposed to the elements when working outside including those involved with snow and ice clearance. The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 requires employers to ensure so far as reasonably practicable the health, safety and welfare of all their employees. The Management (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1999 require that a risk assessment is undertaken of any significant hazards that staff are exposed to.

The need for staff to work outside in snow and ice should be carefully considered and should only be required if deemed essential. When considering whether something is essential there is a need to balance the risk a member of staff is exposed to against the risk faced by failing to carry out the activity. For example, it may be considered necessary for a member of staff to clear the main entrance path of snow and ice to a building, whereas the inspection of remote paths in a country park may be putting staff at unnecessary risk.

When working outdoors there should be consideration of:

- A suitable and sufficient risk assessment
- The current and expected weather conditions
- Lone working arrangements, including means of summoning help
- The provision of suitable personal protective equipment, to include suitable footwear and outer clothing.
- Duration of exposure to adverse weather conditions
- Briefing on activities and effect of cold weather conditions and symptoms to look out for
- The ability of the member of staff to get to the destination, condition of roads and paths
- Regular rest breaks in warm areas and availability/ provision of warm drinks and food and drinking water.
- Effective monitoring and management.

Dealing more specifically with clearing snow and ice the risk assessment should also consider:

- Suitable equipment to do the task
- Physical ability to undertake the task
- Planning of the task to minimise risk to employees
- Minimising physical exertion by ensuring work is undertaken at a suitable pace with regular breaks
- Minimising manual handling by using mechanical lifting aids such as trolleys where possible
- Briefing on activities and effect of cold and wet weather conditions and symptoms to look out for such as frost bite and hypothermia.





Winter Precautions – Driving

Driving in winter conditions can present its own unique challenges. These range from controlling the vehicle in icy and slippery conditions to being prepared and minimising the chances of a breakdown or accident. The first step in any risk management process is avoidance and considering whether a journey is really necessary must always be the starting point. Customers should consider the risk posed to staff when requiring them to drive in snow and ice conditions and make extra allowances for delays and extra time for journeys.

Below Zurich Municipal has outlined a number of tips to help drivers prepare for any adverse weather conditions.

Be Prepared

- Consider driver training for those driver who may need to drive in such conditions, particularly for those involved in the gritting of roads and clearing of snow and ice
- Ensure vehicles are roadworthy and consider winter servicing
- Ensure regular checks are carried out on the vehicles, including:
 - fluid levels, including anti freeze
 - lights
 - tyres
 - wiper blades
- Ensure up to date weather forecasts are consulted and listen to advice on the radio and news bulletins

- Plan your route (consider using major routes) and allow plenty of time for the journey
- Clear snow and ice from the vehicle prior to using it (including the roof)
- Ensure someone knows where you are and your route
- In case of an emergency consider carrying in the vehicle
 - blanket
 - food and a flask with warm drink/water
 - warm clothes
 - boots
 - torch
 - ice scraper
 - first aid kit
 - mobile phone (charged)
 - tow rope

Driving

- Keep your distance – it can take ten times longer to stop in wintry conditions
- Brake gently to help avoid skidding
- Take care when manoeuvring and driving on gradients
- Prepare for the road conditions ahead such as gradients, junctions and bends
- Ensure your drivers know what to do in the event of a skid.

Zurich Municipal

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